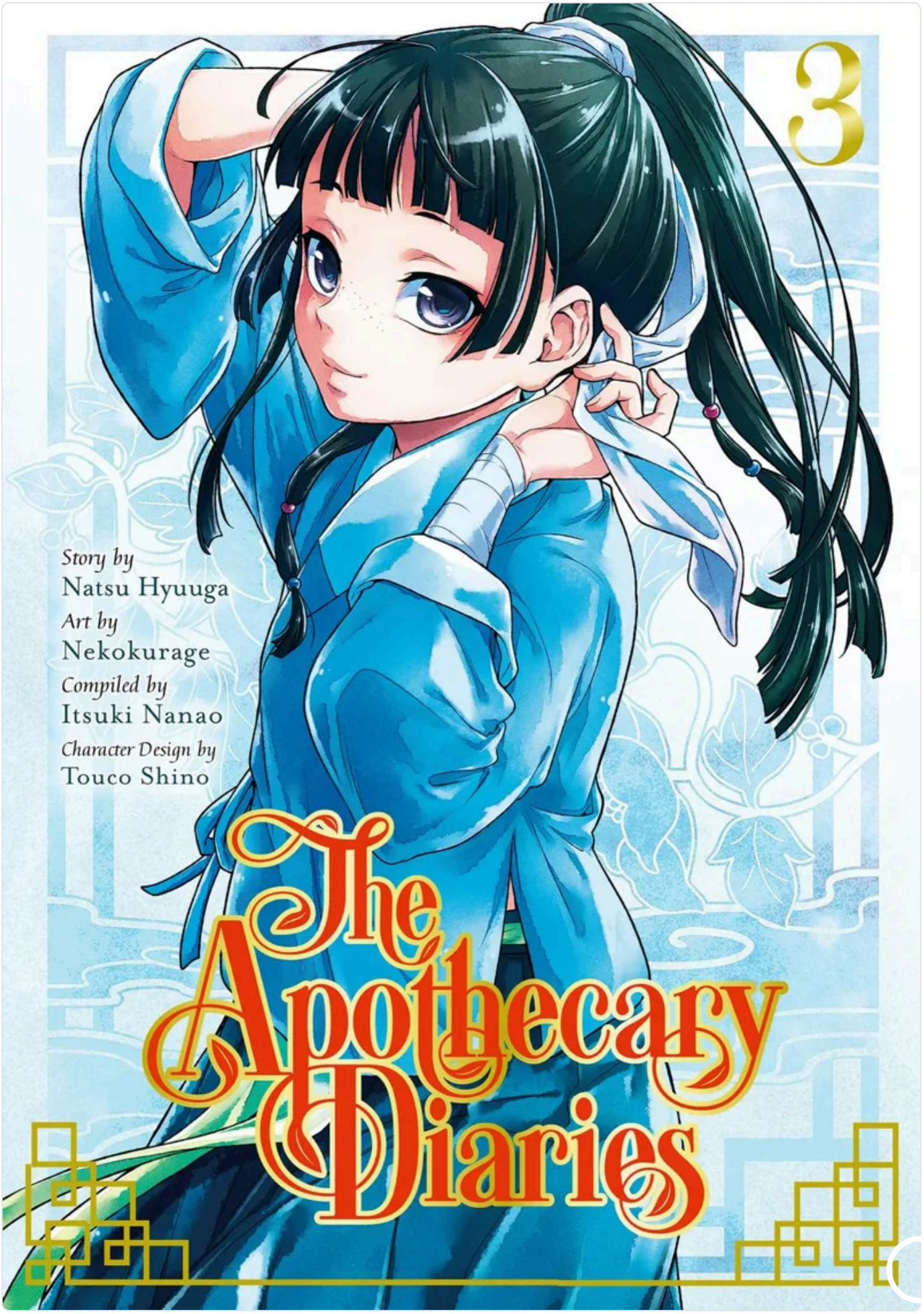
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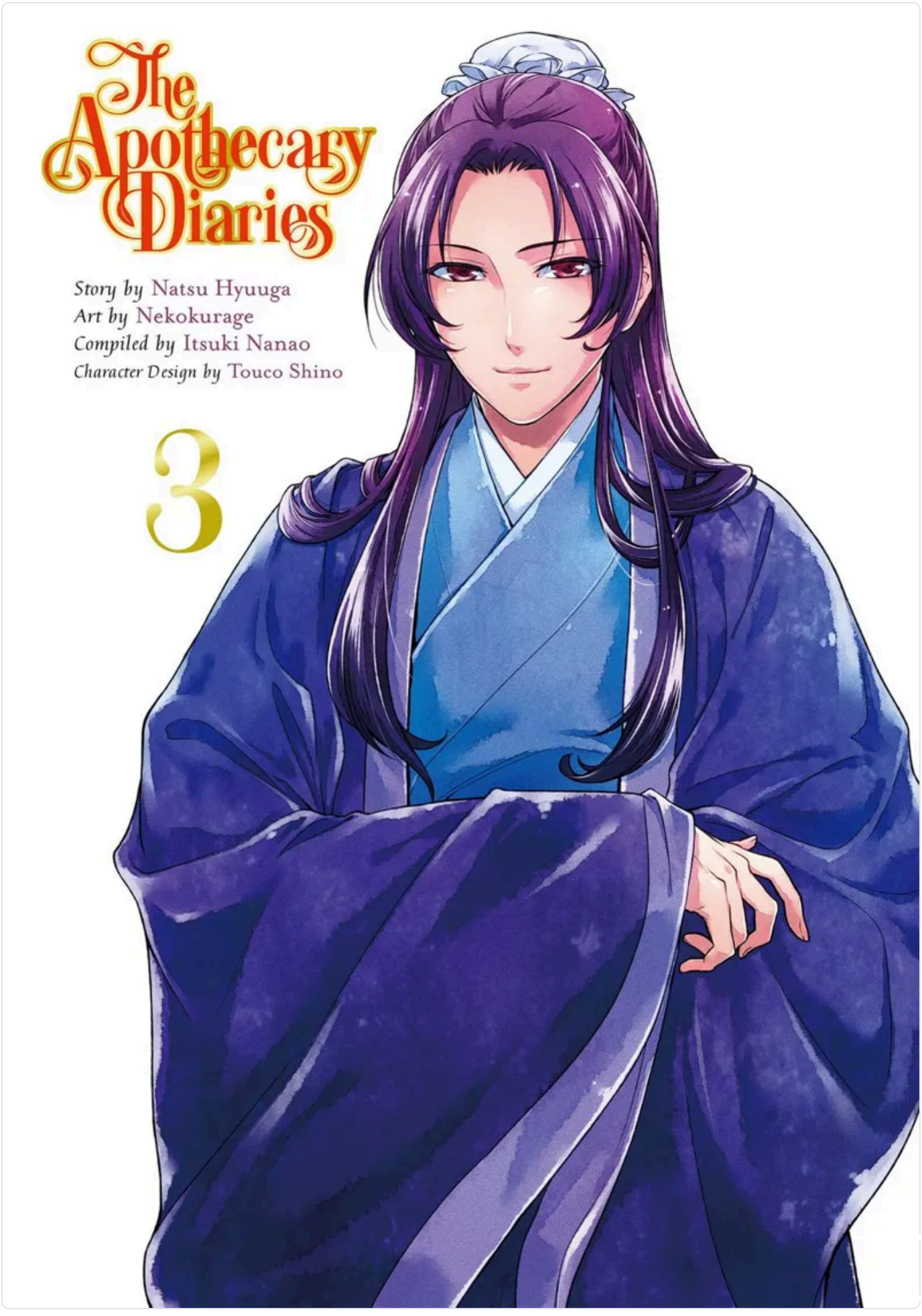
The Apothecary Diaries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The Apothecary Diaries

CONTENTS

Chapter 9 Maomao's Deductions. 003

Chapter 10 The Meaning of the Hairpins. 045

Chapter 11 Returning Home 071

Chapter 12 Straw. 105

Chapter 13 The Misunderstanding 145

Chapter 14 Alcohol 175

ZZZ
ZZZ
AWAKE
OH, RIGHT.
YESTER-DAY...
.....UH, WHERE AM I?

Chapter 9 Maomao's Deductions

OH NO, YOU DON'T!
JUST BECAUSE YOU SPIT OUT THE POISON DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE IN THE CLEAR!
THE MINISTER WHO DRANK THAT TAINTED SOUP IS IN A VERY BAD WAY, I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW!
SICK PEOPLE BELONG IN BED!
THAT'S WHAT THEY TOLD ME...
...BUT LETTING ME SLEEP INTO THE AFTER-NOON IS A BIT MUCH.
I'D BETTER GET READY AND GET TO IT.
A LADY-IN-WAITING LAZING AROUND DOESN'T COME ACROSS WELL.
BUT...
.....I JUST DON'T FEEL AT EASE WITH A BARE FACE.

I APOLOGIZE FOR SLEEPING IN SO LATE TODAY.
PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU REQUIRE.
YOU COULD HAVE TAKEN ONE DAY OFF, YOU KNOW?
OH?
...I SEE YOU HAVE FRECKLES AGAIN.
UGH...
IF I MAY, MY LADY, I WOULD LIKE TO KEEP THEM. I FIND MYSELF FEELING UNSETTLED OTHERWISE.

EVERY-ONE'S DYING TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU.
I WAS HOUNDED RELENT-LESSLY AFTER YOUR SOUP TASTING. IT WAS AWFUL!
INDEED!
OH?
THAT WAS ODDLY EASY.
I TRIED TO BE SUBDUED TO AVOID RAISING A FUSS...
...BUT IT APPEARS I FAILED.
FORGIVE ME FOR CAUSING YOU SUCH DISTRESS, MY LADY.
OH, IT'S FINE!
HUH?
SHE'S NOT GOING TO SCOLD ME?
ANYHOW, GAO SHUN HAS BEEN HERE ALL MORNING. WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH HIM?

YOU MADE HIM WEED .....?
RIP
RIP
...SO I SENT HIM OUT TO WEED THE GARDEN.
HE DIDN'T APPEAR TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO...
WHAT A DILI-GENT GUY.
AT THE BANQUET, HE WAS SEATED WHERE A HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL WOULD BE.
HMM...
...BUT GAO SHUN ACCEPTING IS MORE CURIOUS STILL.
ASKING SUCH A THING OF SOMEONE WITH GAO SHUN'S STATUS IS CURIOUS ENOUGH...
...IS BOUND TO STEAL THE HEARTS OF THE PALACE LADIES-IN-WAITING.
HE'S SO... HAND-SOME...
SIR GAO SHUN!
A MAN LIKE HIM...

HONG-NIANG.
RIGHT AWAY!
MAY HE AND I SPEAK IN THE SITTING ROOM, MY LADY?
VERY WELL!
WE'LL CALL HIM IN.
THE HEAD LADY'S EYES...
...SEEM TO BE SPARKLING FOR SOME REASON.
HUM
HUM
COME BACK SOON, NOW!
BRISK
PERFECT
...BUT HER OVER-WHELMING COMPETENCE MUST GIVE MEN PAUSE, KEEPING THEM AWAY.
SHE'S PRETTY, TO BE SURE...

SIR JINSHI ASKED ME...
...TO BRING THIS TO YOU.
OH!
THE SOUP MEANT FOR CONSORT GYOKUYO.
TRANS-PORTING IT WITH SUCH CARE...
THEY MUST WANT ME TO EXAMINE IT MORE CLOSELY FOR CLUES.

IS SOME-THING WRONG?
STARE
HMM...
PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK IT.
I WASN'T PLAN-NING TO.
"TASTE GOOD"? WE ARE TALKING OF THE POISONED SOUP, ARE WE NOT?
...SO NOW THAT THE METAL OF THE BOWL HAS OXIDIZED, THE BROTH WILL NO LONGER TASTE GOOD.
SILVER IS QUICK TO TARNISH...

BY THE WAY...
...DID YOU HAPPEN TO TOUCH THIS WITH YOUR BARE HANDS OR ANYTHING?
NO.
I DID NOT TOUCH THE BOWL.
WRAP
DOESN'T EVEN WANT TO TOUCH IT...
WRAP
I SIMPLY SCOOPED SOME OF THE SOUP INTO A SPOON TO VERIFY WHETHER OR NOT IT HAD BEEN POISONED.
THEN I IMME-DIATELY WRAPPED IT UP IN A CLOTH.
HMM.
GRIN
A MOMENT, IF YOU PLEASE.

I SEE YOU HAVE BROUGHT COTTON, FLOUR, AND A BRUSH.
THAT'S RIGHT.

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THEM?
AT AN APOTHECARY WHERE I ONCE WAS...
...THEY WOULD DAUB THEIR JARS AND CANISTERS WITH DYE TO PREVENT MISCHIEF.
I'LL APPLY THAT SAME IDEA HERE.

THE FLOUR, I SOURCED FROM THE KITCHEN...
JUST GONNA BORROW A BIT OF THIS...
...THE BRUSH AND COTTON, FROM A BED-CHAMBER.

IT'S QUITE EASY, REALLY.
YOU TAKE A SMALL BALL OF COTTON...
...ROLL IT IN A BIT OF FLOUR, TAKING CARE TO KEEP THE COATING LIGHT...
PAFF ぽふ
...THEN DUST THE BOWL ALL OVER WITH IT.
ぽふ PAFF
FINALLY, USE THE BRUSH TO SWEEP OFF THE EXCESS FLOUR...
...AND THERE YOU HAVE IT.

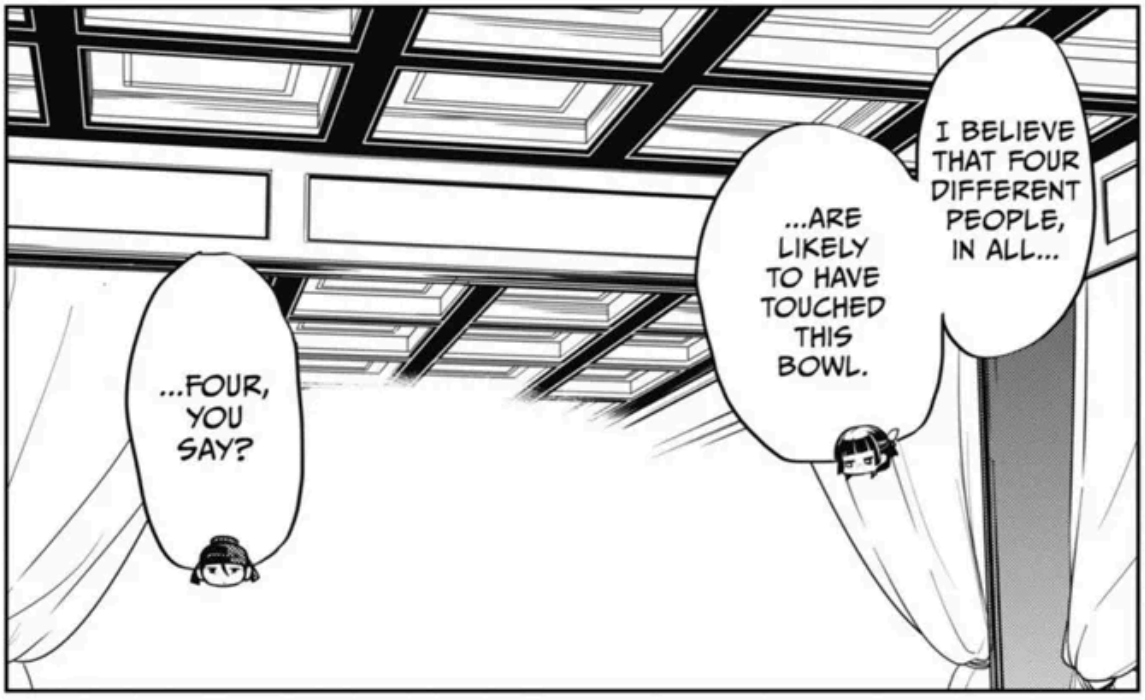
IT LEFT WHITE TRACES ON THE BOWL.
YES, THAT'S WHERE SOMEONE PICKED UP THE BOWL WITH THEIR HANDS.
FINGER-TIPS TEND TO SECRETE OILS...
...SO WHEN WE TOUCH SOMETHING LIKE METAL, WE LEAVE MARKS ON IT WITHOUT MEANING TO.
THOSE OILS ARE LEFT BEHIND ON THE SURFACE IN THE SHAPE OF THE PATTERN FOUND ON OUR FINGERTIPS.
THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF SILVER DISHES, WHICH TARNISH EASILY.
OF COURSE ...
...SILVER DISHES THAT ARE CLOUDED OVER BECOME USELESS FOR OUR PURPOSES ...
...SO WE TAKE GREAT PAINS TO AVOID TOUCHING THE DISHES WITH OUR BARE HANDS...
...WHEN CLEANING AND POLISHING THEM, YOU SEE?

SO...
...WHAT YOU ARE SAYING IS THAT THESE FINGER MARKS WERE LEFT...
HMM...
...BY THOSE WHO PICKED UP THE BOWL AFTER IT HAD BEEN POLISHED.
EXACTLY.
コク NOD

17

SINCE THE FLOUR GRAINS ARE LARGE, IT'S A BIT HARD TO MAKE OUT...
...BUT BY LOOKING AT THE SIZES AND POSITIONS OF THE MARKS...
...I SHOULD AT LEAST BE ABLE TO DEDUCE...
...THE NUMBER OF WAYS IN WHICH THE BOWL WAS HELD.
THIS BOWL WAS TOUCHED BY—
GASP
YES? WHAT IS IT?

I MANAGED TO PLAY IT OFF AS A CARELESS MISTAKE YESTER-DAY...
...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE MY EFFORTS WERE FOR NAUGHT.
SIGH...
?
OH, NOTH-ING.


...FOUR, YOU SAY?
...ARE LIKELY TO HAVE TOUCHED THIS BOWL.
I BELIEVE THAT FOUR DIFFERENT PEOPLE, IN ALL...

FIRST ...
...WE HAVE THE THREE WHO HELD IT AROUND THE BASE.
...THE PERSON WHO SET THE BOWL ON THE TRAY...
THE PERSON WHO POURED THE SOUP INTO THE BOWL...
...AND THE VIRTUOUS CONSORT'S FOOD TASTER.
THAT LEAVES ONE OTHER.
SOME-ONE WHO TOUCHED THE RIM OF THE BOWL.
I THINK THOSE FOUR ACCOUNT FOR THE FINGER MARKS WE FOUND.
IF THIS IS TRUE...

BUT...
...WHY WOULD THE FOOD TASTER ...?
...THAT WOULD MAKE THE UNKNOWN FOURTH PERSON AND THE FOOD TASTER THE MOST LIKELY SUSPECTS, CORRECT?
...IT'S QUITE SIMPLE.
...SHE PURPOSELY SWITCHED THE BOWL IN SECRET WITH THE ONE ON CONSORT GYOKUYO'S TRAY.
WHILE KNOWING FULL WELL WHAT LADY LISHU CAN AND CANNOT EAT...

THE MALICIOUS INTENT BEHIND HER ACTIONS IS OBVIOUS.
SHE DID IT TO BULLY HER LADY.
I SEE YOU FIND THAT HARD TO TAKE IN.
A MERE MAID? BULLYING A CONSORT OF LADY LISHU'S RANK?
BULLY HER LADY.....?

THIS IS ALL SPECULATION ON MY PART. PLEASE DO BEAR THAT IN MIND.
THAT'S FINE.
TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW, IF YOU WOULD.
.....I THINK SO.
DO YOU RECALL WHAT CONSORT LISHU WORE AT THE GARDEN BANQUET?
A GOWN OF GARISHLY DEEP PINK, I BELIEVE.
YES.

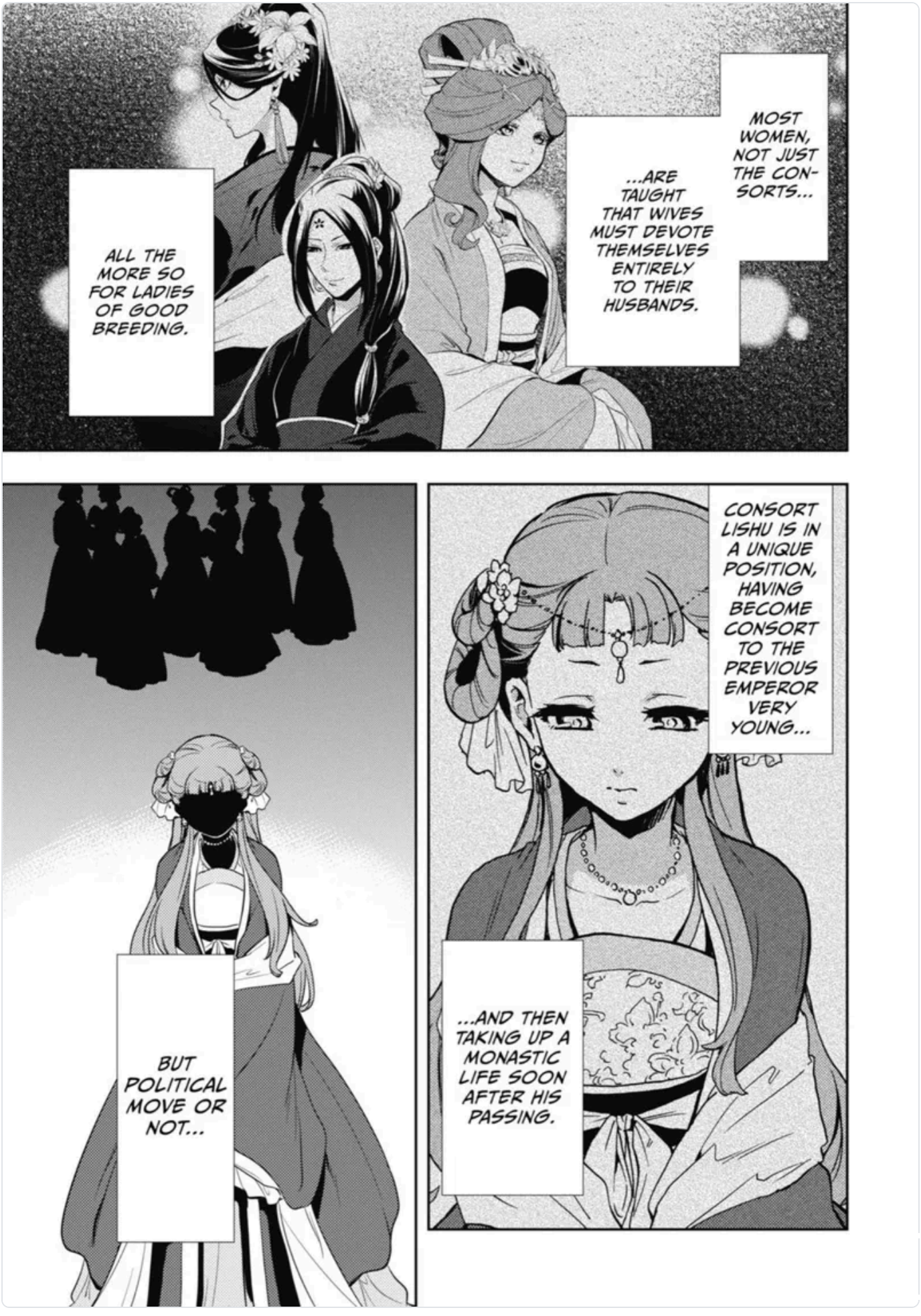
IF THE CONSORT HERSELF HAD CHOSEN THAT GARB...
...AND IT'S CLEAR THAT SHE WOULD CLASH WITH CONSORT GYOKUYO.
PUT A LITTLE THOUGHT INTO IT...
...THEN WE SHOULD TOO...
IF SHE'S GOING TO WEAR THIS COLOR...
OTHER-WISE...
OH, YOU THINK SO?
THE WHITE ONE WOULD SUIT YOU MUCH BETTER!
...HER LADIES-IN-WAITING WOULD HAVE RECOM-MENDED A DIFFERENT OUTFIT.
...THEY WOULD HAVE DRESSED TO MATCH THEIR LADY.
HOWEVER, ALL OF CONSORT LISHU'S ATTENDANTS WERE WEARING WHITE.

AS SUCH...
...CONSORT LISHU, IN HER GAUDY PINK DRESS...
...WAS MADE TO LOOK A FOOL.
IT IS THE JOB OF A LADY-IN-WAITING TO MAKE HER MISTRESS LOOK GOOD.
WE DRESS PLAINLY SO THAT SHE CAN STAND OUT.
IN WHICH CASE...
...THE QUARREL BETWEEN THE LADIES-IN-WAITING THAT DAY...
...ALSO TAKES ON A NEW LIGHT.

CONSORT LISHU DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT CLOTHING IS APPRO-PRIATE...
...FOR SOME-ONE OF HER POSITION TO WEAR.
THE PURE CON-SORT'S LADIES...
...WERE REMON-STRATING CONSORT LISHU'S SHAMELESS ATTENDANTS ...
...FOR KNOWING THIS OF THEIR MISTRESS AND STILL CHOOSING TO NOT ADVISE HER OTHERWISE.
IN THE INNER COURT, WHERE ENEMIES ABOUND...
...HER LADIES-IN-WAITING...
...ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE A CONSORT CAN TRULY TRUST.

I THINK THE YOUNG LADY LISHU...
...WAS GOADED INTO HER CHOICE OF DRESS BY HER LADIES-IN-WAITING...
...WHO FLATTERED HER WITH COMPLIMENTS, SAYING HOW WELL IT LOOKED ON HER.
SHE NEVER QUES-TIONED THEIR INTENT.
IF THEY THUS PLAYED ON HER FAITH IN THEM...
...AND SOUGHT WITTINGLY TO HUMILIATE HER...

...THEN IT EXPLAINS HER BANQUET DRESS.
SO YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT HER LADIES DIDN'T STOP THERE...
...AND WENT AS FAR AS REPLACING HER DISH WITH ANOTHER'S, JUST TO CAUSE HER GREATER DISTRESS?
YES.
AS A RESULT, SHE BARELY SURVIVED WITH HER LIFE.
IT'S A TERRIBLE THING TO DO.


ALL THE MORE SO FOR LADIES OF GOOD BREEDING.
...ARE TAUGHT THAT WIVES MUST DEVOTE THEMSELVES ENTIRELY TO THEIR HUSBANDS.
MOST WOMEN, NOT JUST THE CONSORTS...
BUT POLITICAL MOVE OR NOT...
...AND THEN TAKING UP A MONASTIC LIFE SOON AFTER HIS PASSING.
CONSORT LISHU IS IN A UNIQUE POSITION, HAVING BECOME CONSORT TO THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR VERY YOUNG...

...AS GROSSLY IMMORAL.
...REGARD WEDDING THE SON OF ONE'S DEAD HUSBAND ...
...MOST OTHER PEOPLE ...
LIKE SO.
I'M GUESSING THEY HELD THE BOWL STEADY AS THEY STIRRED IT IN.
I SEE.
THE MARKS LEFT ON THE RIM OF THE BOWL...
...MUST BELONG TO THE CULPRIT WHO MIXED IN THE POISON.
30

THE PLACES WHERE NOBLES AND OFFICIALS MAY PUT THEIR LIPS...
...ARE NOT TO BE SULLIED BY OUR FINGERS.
WE'RE NEVER TO TOUCH THE RIMS OF THE DISHES.
HONG-NIANG TAUGHT ME THAT.
THIS IS MERELY MY VIEW, BUT...
THEN...
...HER LADY-IN-WAITING SWITCHED THE POISONED SOUP WITH CONSORT GYOKUYO'S.
...I BELIEVE THIS RUDE INDIVIDUAL TO BE THE ONE WHO POISONED CONSORT LISHU'S BOWL.

LUCKILY, I DISCOVERED THE POISON WHEN I WAS TASTING THE DISHES...
...SO NO HARM CAME TO CONSORT GYOKUYO.
AND ULTIMATELY, CONSORT LISHU...
...BULLIED THOUGH SHE WAS, ESCAPED WITH HER LIFE AS WELL.
.....
MAY I ASK YOU SOME-THING?
THAT'S ABOUT ALL THERE IS TO IT.
THAT SAID...
...I HAVE NO WAY OF TELLING IF THE BULLYING AND THE POISONER ARE RELATED, OF COURSE.
32

!
WHY DID YOU TRY TO COVER FOR THAT LADY-IN-WAITING YESTERDAY?
YES?
I'M JUST CURI-OUS.
I DON'T HARBOR ANY ULTERIOR MOTIVES.
STAAARE
THE LIFE OF A LADY-IN-WAIT-ING...

...IS WORTH FAR LESS THAN THE LIFE OF A CONSORT.
THIS IS ESPE-CIALLY TRUE...
...OF US FOOD TASTERS.

MY THANKS.
I SHALL BE SURE TO FULLY EXPLAIN THE SITUATION TO SIR JINSHI.

WELL ...
...I OWE HER ONE.

SHE DID ME A FAVOR WHEN SHE SWITCHED THOSE SOUPS.
AWW, I REALLY WISH...
...I'D DRUNK IT ALL DOWN.
—THAT ENDS MY REPORT.

YOUR TALENT FOR TALKING ...
...MANAGES TO IMPRESS ME EVERY TIME.
INDEED?
SO IT WAS AN INSIDE JOB.

THAT IS WHAT THE CIRCUM-STANCES WOULD APPEAR TO SUGGEST.
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY.
SIGH
I'M DONE WITH THINKING. I WANT TO STOP NOW!
I HAVEN'T EVEN GOTTEN A CHANCE TO CHANGE!
I HAVEN'T HAD THE TIME TO SLEEP A WINK SINCE YESTERDAY THANKS TO THIS MESS!

YOUR TRUE FACE IS SHOWING, SIR.
LOLL ぐでー…
IT'S FINE. NO ONE'S HERE.
I AM HERE.
BESIDES WHICH...
YOU MUST NOT.
MENACE ぬう
DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO BE SO SERIOUS ALL THE TIME?

SIR JINSHI.
BEING UNDER HIS WATCHFUL EYE SINCE THE DAY I WAS BORN HAS BEEN SUCH A PAIN.
YOU'RE STILL WEARING THAT HAIRPIN.
OH.
DAMN.
I FORGOT ALL ABOUT IT.

41

YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF IT.
ポイ
Toss
I DOUBT YOUR TRUE IDENTITY HAS BEEN DISCOVERED SINCE IT WAS HIDDEN IN YOUR HAIR.
THERE YOU GO AGAIN ...
... BEING CARE-LESS WITH IT!
THIS IS OF GREAT IMPOR-TANCE.
YOU MUST TREAT IT ACCORD-INGLY.

YES, YES! I KNOW!
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU DO.

BYE!
I SHALL LEAVE YOU TO IT.
UGH, I WANT A BREAK.
SIGH...
...TIME TO MAKE SHORT WORK OF ALL THIS.